

# Highover Junior and Infant School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117115
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	312496
<b>Inspection date</b>	21 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Martin Newell

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3-11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	229
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Nigel Pollard
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Lisa Hayes
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	24 March 2003
<b>School address</b>	Cambridge Road Hitchin Hertfordshire SG1 3JA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 622333
<b>Fax number</b>	01462 622444

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the consistency of progress and achievement across the school and the impact on standards, teaching, learning and the school's systems for tracking and target setting, how effectively the school brings about improvements and the capacity for further improvement. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, sampling of pupils' work, assessment and target setting information, evidence of impact of different initiatives to raise standards and discussions with pupils, key members of staff and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as detailed in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Highover Infant and Junior School is an average sized school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is similar to the national average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the number of pupils with a statement of special educational need are both close to the picture nationally. The school has a high percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and for a substantial number of these pupils, English is not their first language. The school was awarded Basic Skills Quality Mark in 2007 and has gained Investors in People recognition. The school is currently working towards Healthy Schools status and Sports Active Mark.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Highover is a good school with outstanding features. It enjoys considerable support and appreciation from parents. Comments from parents spoke about the 'special racial harmony', 'innovative ideas to stimulate learning' and 'a school leadership team that have a real vision of where they want the school to be.' The qualities in leadership and management, teaching, assessment and the curriculum, together with the significant contribution of the pupils are a winning combination. By the time pupils leave school, they are individuals who achieve well both academically and socially and are well equipped to face the next challenges in their lives. The driving force behind the school's many successes is the headteacher. Her outstanding leadership means that Highover is a school that never stands still and she leads the school with great vision, innovation, determination and rigour, while at the same time bringing staff, governors, pupils and parents with her. It is a school that is striving for excellence. A vision that is shared by staff, governors and pupils. The school's own evaluation of its effectiveness is spot on and recognises the bar of expectation needs to be set even higher if excellence is to be achieved. The school's track record of identifying and tackling weaknesses suggests that it has a very strong capacity for continued improvement that would enable the vision to become a reality.

Attainment on entry is broadly in line with national expectations, although aspects of communication and pupils' social development are sometimes a little lower. By the time that pupils leave school, standards are above average. This represents good progress and achievement. The 2007 results were a little lower but this was because of high levels of pupil mobility for the cohort and the fact that this group of pupils had a turbulent transition through the school. The present Year 6 are well on track to reach the challenging targets that have been set and standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. The school rightly recognises that there is scope for standards to be even higher because on occasions the challenge on offer for the more able pupils is not quite demanding enough. The school is always looking at initiatives to improve standards. A good example is 'Big Writing', which has been introduced for younger pupils and is to be extended to the older pupils. Already the shoots of success are being seen with standards rising rapidly and a higher level of motivation and enthusiasm for writing, particularly from the boys. The headteacher has introduced robust systems for regularly assessing and tracking pupils' progress in the core subjects. Regular meetings are held with class teachers to ensure that pupils' challenging targets are being met. This ensures that teachers are held fully accountable for the progress of pupils across the school. This whole process is helped by the good and consistent quality of marking of pupils' work, which gives pupils clear pointers for improvement, which they readily take on board.

The good progress made by pupils is as a direct result of the good and, on occasions, outstanding teaching. Teachers and support staff go the extra-mile to make learning fun and enjoyable. Tasks are interesting and motivate and enthuse the pupils in equal measure. Across the school, relationships are a real strength and adults and pupils are at ease in each other's company. Management of pupils is excellent. Many of the classrooms are alive with vibrant displays and packed full of learning prompts that pupils constantly refer to. Much teaching sees work that is well matched to pupils' individual abilities, although occasionally this process could be sharper so that much is consistently asked of the more able pupils to push them on to even higher standards. However, it is in this very effective learning environment that pupils thrive and are ready to play their part to the full. Their personal development is outstanding. Pupils

demonstrate an infectious enthusiasm for learning and all that the school offers. They behave well and their love of school is reflected in the above average attendance rates. Pupils are reflective, thoughtful individuals who have an excellent awareness of how their actions can impact on others. Their understanding of Britain as a culturally diverse society is outstanding and adds significantly to the tremendous sense of racial harmony that wraps around the school. Pupils make an impressive contribution to the school as a community through carrying out a wide range of jobs and responsibilities, such as recycling, playground buddies, organising compost bins and through the school council have a genuine voice, which has brought about many improvements to the school grounds and facilities. Pupils organise many fund-raising activities and contribute to local events and projects. Pupils feel their efforts are greatly valued and is perhaps best summed up by one pupil who said, 'We feel privileged our teachers trust us so much.' When you add pupils' excellent knowledge of what is needed to follow a healthy lifestyle and how to manage issues in their lives, it is easy to see why pupils play such an influential role in making the school what it is.

Pupils' enjoyment and achievements also owe much to the curriculum on offer and to the care and guidance provided. The curriculum is rich and varied. Many pupils in school are given the opportunity to play a musical instrument and pupils in the juniors learn French. The school employs specialist teachers in subjects such as art and design, physical education and the performing arts which, when coupled with the utilisation of the individual skills of teachers within school, all bring another dimension to the quality and vibrancy of the curriculum. The school has recently introduced the 'International Primary Curriculum' which is geared to providing a more cross curricular and creative approach to learning as well as including international and environmental issues. This is an important move forward for the school because overtime there have not been enough opportunities to develop pupils' writing, problem solving and thinking skills in a more innovative and creative manner across different subjects and through other curriculum initiatives. Enrichment opportunities through residential visits, visitors, themed weeks and after school clubs are very good and help to bring learning to life as well as being thoroughly enjoyed by pupils. The good provision for pupils with learning difficulties, for gifted and talented pupils and for pupils whose first language is not English contributes much to their achievement. The pastoral care for pupils is excellent. The very good links with outside support agencies means that help can be called on quickly if any pupil is experiencing any social or emotional need. Pupils feel very safe and secure in school and spoke eloquently about how bullying is not an issue at Highover. Pupils feel that they have a genuine voice in the life of the school and a voice that is 'listened to and respected.' Procedures for the safeguarding of pupils are all securely in place and assiduously followed. Academic guidance is good because many pupils are aware of their individual targets. However, this good practice is more established in some classes than others and the school has identified the need also to establish more robust systems for measuring pupils' progress in the foundation subjects.

Highover is a successful school because everybody plays their part in moving the school forward. There is a very strong team spirit where the contributions of all staff are valued and recognised. Good systems are in place for monitoring teaching, learning, for data analysis and for evaluating the work and performance of the school. The senior leadership team is effective and very good use is made of the individual skills of its members. Governance is good because governors are very supportive yet challenging. The governors and subject leaders are now beginning to play a sharper and more rigorous role in evaluating the school's performance and recognise the need to embed this fully in school practice.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

The provision in the Foundation Stage is good with some outstanding aspects. Pupils get off to a flying start in the Nursery and Reception classes because of the good and at times excellent teaching and the vibrant learning opportunities on offer. Adults work together very well. Increasingly a very good balance is being struck between adult led and child initiated learning activities. Assessment is ongoing and the information used well to guide and inform future teaching. Very good use is made of the outside accommodation. The staff recognise the need to provide as many structured role play opportunities as possible and to capitalise more on opportunities to extend pupils' speaking, listening and social skills, because these are often the weaker aspects of attainment when pupils start at the school. The accommodation is an attractive learning environment where pupils are keen and eager to learn and where they enjoy themselves fully and achieve well. Management of provision is good and there are very good links with parents and induction procedures to ensure that pupils settle quickly and confidently into school routines.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that the challenge for the more able pupils is consistently high to enable standards to rise even further.
- Embed the opportunities for pupils to enhance their writing, problem solving and creative thinking skills across different subjects and through innovative curriculum initiatives.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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### Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.



## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

22 February 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Highover Infant and Junior School, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG40JP

You will probably remember that I visited your school not too long ago and I am now writing to let you know what I found out. Before I do, I would first of all like to say thank you for making me feel so welcome and making my visit one that I will remember for a long time. I have told your teachers how you were all so helpful and polite. Through my discussions with you it was great to hear how much you love coming to school and how much fun you find it. It was also good to hear about how safe you feel in school, that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried.

I found so many good things about Highover School that I have decided it is a good school with some outstanding features. Teachers and other staff make teaching and learning fun and help you to achieve well and reach good standards. The curriculum, the clubs, the visits and visitors are all good. The way in which the school helps you to keep safe and healthy and how it looks after you are all major strengths. Mrs Hayes is an outstanding headteacher and together with all the staff and governors, makes the school such a good place to learn. There is a tremendous strength of the school that I have not mentioned yet. That is you- the children- what excellent ambassadors for the school you are! You behave well and your enthusiasm is great! You know so much about keeping healthy and make a real difference to the life of the school through the school council and your readiness to take on jobs and responsibilities. The way that all of you get on so well together is impressive. Well done!

Even good schools like yours can improve. I have asked your teachers to make sure that work is always challenging enough and to help you further improve your learning by providing lots of opportunities to test out your writing and other skills in different subjects and other exciting activities. Mrs Hayes, the staff and governors want the school to continue to be as successful and I know you will play your part by continuing to behave well and work hard. I wish you every success in your future. It was a pleasure and privilege to meet you.

Martin Newell

Lead inspector